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## THE DOUBLE SACRIFICE OR THE PONTIFICAL ZOUAVES.

A TALE OF CASTELFIDARDO.

Translated from the Flemish of the Rev. S. Daems Canon Regular of the Order of Premonstratensians. (Abbot of Tongerlo, Belgium.)

CHAPTER XIV.—CONTINUED.

And the other—he that had framed the bellish plan, and pursued it with fiendish obstinacy even to the end—had heard suddenly in that awful moment the call of grace, and his soul had left its earthly tabernacle with a prayer which reached the heart of his Judge, and forbade Him to condemn it.

The one was taken and the other left. Was it not because prayers had been offered for the unhappy Gennaro, and because prayer is all powerful; above all the prayer of the just for the salvation of the lost soul? Stefano, Nunziata, Victor—could the Lord have rejected your prayers and your tears? And the grey haired father who stood by the throne of the Most High, the victim of his paternal care and love, so cruelly slain by the hand of the son whom he was striving to recall to the path of duty—how could the prayer of his love and of his sorrow fail to find an echo in the tenderness of all hearts—the Heart of the Victim of Golgotha—of Him who was crucified by His erring children, and who, for the salvation of those erring children, gave His Blood and His Life.

A conflict had been waged between Victor and Gennaro, wherein the first must needs have been triumphant—a conflict between Christian love and fiendish hate. Could Christian love fail to gain the victory? and would Victor's triumph have been complete if he had been disappointed of his enemy's conversion? Had he not devoted himself to death, rather than expose his enemy to an eternity of misery? Could the Lord refuse so heroic a sacrifice?

No. Prayer and love had robbed hell of its prey. Victor was still bending over the body of the penitent 'carbonaro.'

His companions knelt and prayed for the repose of the sinner. Victor tenderly closed the eyes of the departed, while tears of love and compassion, precious as pearls in God's sight, fell upon his face.

He imprinted a kiss upon the dead lips. 'Sleep sweetly, poor friend,' said he, 'and God grant that I may be able to carry your last words to Stefano and Nunziata.'

Then a dark film seemed to cover his eyes, he turned deadly pale, and fell fainting to the ground.

He had forgotten his own sufferings in laboring for the everlasting salvation of his enemy.—Charity had given him strength to overcome the anguish of his wound, but his task was now accomplished, and nature again claimed the ascendancy.

Joseph and Martin sprang to his assistance.—They gently raised his head, and sprinkled his face with fresh water from the stream. It was fruitless.

'Woe is me!' cried Joseph, 'he is dying.' Martin wrung his hands in despair. 'My God!' he cried, 'take me in his place. Poor mother! Unhappy father! What a blow, what a sorrow for you.'

'Victor, dear Victor,' whispered Joseph in his ear. And he pressed his hand. The hand seemed to thrill to his touch, and Joseph uttered a joyful cry when Victor once more feebly opened his eyes.

The two comrades bent over him. 'Friends,' he gasped with a broken voice, 'my last hour is at hand; I feel it. I beseech you fly, and take care of your own safety.'

'And you, Victor?' said Martin. 'I shall die here. Far from fatherland, indeed, but near the Holy House of Loretto. Go

on at once my brothers, for the enemy may return and make you prisoners.'

'Leave you,' was the answer of both, 'never, never.'

'I have only a few moments to live.' 'Never, never.'

'Look here,' said Martin, 'the Piedmontese may come when they like, but not a step do I stir from this place.'

The wounded man shed tears of gratitude over this proof of faithful attachment.

Suddenly a sound of approaching troops was heard in the distance. The Zouaves listened attentively. It was indeed a division of the enemy, in search of any remaining fugitives whom they might make prisoners.

'Good heavens!' cried Joseph, 'the Piedmontese are upon us. My God, my God! what can we do?'

'Oh, my friends, go! go!' replied Victor; 'leave me to my fate.'

'Without you? Never.' 'God will protect me.'

'We will not leave you.' 'At all events, my sufferings cannot last long.'

'I stir not one step from this place,' said Martin positively. 'Carry me into the wood, and perhaps I shall escape their hands.'

'To die there,' cried Joseph, 'alone and forsaken like a helpless beast—like a worthless dog. God would never forgive us.'

The steps of the approaching band sounded nearer and near. Joseph and Martin stirred not. 'Fly! Fly!' cried Victor. 'Friends, I implore you, endanger yourselves no longer for one who is passed all hope of recovery.'

The danger became pressing; any further delay must make escape impossible. Suddenly a light seemed to strike Martin.

'Victor,' said he, 'would you have strength enough to bear the fatigue of the flight if I were to carry you on my shoulders?'

'Perhaps so, but to what purpose, brothers? I should only be a hindrance to you. I beg you therefore once more to go and leave me in the hands of God.'

'Never, Victor; we stir not without you.' 'Be it so, then,' answered the wounded man, whose hopes that his two comrades would be thus preserved seemed to give him new strength.

'By God's help, then,' said Martin; and with Joseph's assistance he placed the dying man on his broad shoulders.

Victor cast a last glance on Gennaro's body. 'Farewell, poor Gennaro,' said he, 'we shall soon meet again.'

Martin, followed by Joseph, set off at full speed with his precious burden into the wood, and soon disappeared among the trees.

It was time, for they had scarcely left the place when it was filled by the hostile division. 'Coppers,' exclaimed the commander, at the sight of the two bodies; 'there has been fighting here.'

'These are two Piedmontese,' added another. They examined the two bodies.

'Per bacco! This is the mysterious fellow who so lately joined us. Here is his companion, Orazio, the only one with whom he would keep company. Now, rather than I, if this was to be the end of it.'

'They must have been killed in the pursuit of the Papal troops. Yes, here lies one of their weapons. Where can the birds of prey be hiding themselves.'

'Perhaps in the wood here; shall we seek for them.'

'No, no; forward!' answered the leader.—'They must have passed on long ago, for he,' pointing to Orazio, 'is already cold and stiff—his companion must have wrestled longer with death.'

Meanwhile, the three Zouaves continued their flight through the wood; few words passed between them.

Victor leaned his fainting head against Martin's shoulder, and sometimes, when the unevenness of the ground shook him in his bearer's arms, a suppressed groan of pain escaped him.

'Courage, dearest friend,' whispered Martin to him; 'we shall soon, I hope, reach a place of safety.'

'God grant it,' answered Victor. 'But my good friend, I am too heavy a burden to you; why will you not leave me to my fate. I shall not hold out much longer.'

'Look here, Victor,' answered Martin, 'speak to me no more about it, unless you want to grieve my heart. It is of no kind of use.'

They had now reached a little hollow in the wood; the green turf and the shade of the trees invited them to rest.

'Shall we rest here for a while?' said Joseph to Martin. 'It will be perhaps dangerous to leave the wood before nightfall.'

'As you will,' was the answer. They placed Victor carefully on the grass, leaning his head on Joseph's breast.

They then said their rosary for the good success of their flight, and Victor, weak as he was, followed the prayers as well as he could.

Joseph had already bound up his wound, which, as we have said, was slight. They then dressed Victor's more carefully, washed away the blood, and placed a new bandage upon it; and the poor sufferer, very much relieved, fell into a comfortable sleep.

Towards evening, they set off again, and soon reached the boundary of the wood.

They had only made a few steps beyond it, when they saw five Piedmontese soldiers approaching in the opposite direction.

There was but just time for them to hide themselves once more in the wood.

### CHAPTER XV.—THE HERMITAGE.

The Piedmontese soldiers apparently had not observed the three fugitives, for they went on their way without molesting them.

The Zouaves thanked God for their deliverance from the danger, and suffered a little time to elapse before they resumed their journey.

Their hope of escape was increased by their deliverance from this new peril, but their position was assuredly far from secure.

The evening was slowly drawing on; they knew not where they could find a shelter, nor whether Victor, whose strength was already exhausted, would live through the night under the open sky.

Yet the three friends were calm and collected. They pressed onward with confidence, knowing that God's help is near when man's strength fails. Were not the wings of their guardian Angels stretched forth to shelter the pious soldiers? Had not the venerable pastor of Schrambeck reminded them, on their departure, of those blessed words of Holy Scripture, 'He hath given His Angels charge over thee that they keep thee in all thy ways.'

Oh, how consoling—how strengthening in all the adversities of our sorrowful life—is the blessed conviction that the all-seeing eye of the best of Fathers ever watches over His children, that the mighty arm of the Avenger of Innocence is ever raised to protect His own, and that no human power can resist His Providence.

'Whom God will help can no man's wickedness hinder.'

When the three friends had gone on their way for some time, avoiding open places as much as possible, they saw an old man in the distance who seemed bent by the weight of years.

He went slowly along, stopping ever and anon to gather herbs, so that the Zouaves soon overtook him.

He was a venerable-looking man, with a bald head and a long and snow-white beard. His forehead was deeply wrinkled, and his eyes lay deep under his eyebrows; but the calm peace and mild gentleness which marked his countenance, spoke of a soul pure as that of an innocent child, and of a heart kind as that of a loving father.

His dress was simple and coarse; it was of serge, fastened round the waist with a leathern girdle.

He stood still when the Zouaves came up to him. He recognized them, no doubt, for Pontifical

soldiers, for he thus addressed them in a pure French accent:

'Good evening, my children. You have, by God's help doubtless, escaped the massacre.—What can I do to serve you.'

'Venerable man,' said Joseph, 'it is as you say. For God's love, I pray you, if possible, to show us some place of shelter, where we may escape the pursuit of our enemy.'

'God be thanked,' replied the old man, 'that He has brought you to me. I have not much to offer you, yet what I have, is wholly at your disposal. Come; my hermitage is not far from thence; it is no palace, indeed, but it will shelter you from pursuit better than if it were.'

Joseph heartily thanked the good old man for his kindness, and Martin thanked him with a glance of his blue eyes, which expressed all the gratitude of his soul, and which was followed by a look of sorrowful compassion upon the beloved burthen which he bore upon his shoulders.

'Your comrade,' said the old man, 'is severely wounded.'

'Alas! yes, good man,' answered Joseph; 'and we even feared for a time that we had lost him.'

'Now you are good young men who take such loving care of each other. When we get to the Hermitage I will look to his wound, for I have some slight knowledge of medicine, and perhaps God will enable me to heal it. I would send for a surgeon from the nearest village, but it would be dangerous for he has suffered himself to be carried away by this hot-headed Italian movement.'

They struck once more into the wood, and soon reached a little hut, built partly of stone and consisting partly of a natural cave.

At the entrance of the simple dwelling a rude wooden cross had been erected, and a little vegetable garden lay along the side. Behind was a hill of considerable elevation, terminating in a flat surface commanding a view of the country round.

'Here,' said the old man, 'is the Hermitage of Fra Paolo, as the inhabitants of this district call me. Welcome, my children, under the old hermit's roof.'

They entered, with thanks. It was a poor, but neatly-arranged room, containing no other furniture but a crucifix, an image of the Blessed Virgin, a rude table and two rough stools, and a little 'prie-dieu' beside a hard straw bed.

The Hermit opened the door of a second room. 'Bring your comrade in hither,' said he to the two Zouaves. 'Happily I have a bed softer than my own, which sometimes harbors a wandering or weary traveller. As for you, you must be content to-night with my straw bed, and to-morrow I will try to do something better for you. But first let us take care of your wounded friend.'

Martin had already laid his beloved companion on the bed.

Victor tried to speak a few words of thanks to the good old man, but he stopped him.

'Remain quiet and calm. To-morrow, when you are somewhat rested, as I hope, it will be time to thank me, though there is no need of thanks. What am I doing more than every one is bound to do in such a case?'

He carefully took off the bandage, and anxiously examined the deep wound.

Joseph and Martin kept their eyes upon the Hermit's face, to discover whether it betokened the slightest sign of hope. The old man shook his head thoughtfully.

'Well?' anxiously inquired Joseph, in an undertone.

'I am not accustomed,' answered Fra Paolo gently, 'to conceal the truth; if the wound had been a few fingers' breadth higher up, it would have been all over with your comrade. Now, I have some hope of saving him, by God's blessing upon my efforts, which I hope we shall obtain by our prayers.'

He then washed the wound, spread a kind of balsam upon a clean linen cloth, and bound up the wound again with all the skill and dexterity of an experienced surgeon.

Under the wholesome influence of the anodyne,

Victor soon fell into a deep, quiet slumber.

'Now I must take care of you,' said the kind Hermit to the other two. 'My supper is simple and spare, but after such a day as yesterday you may be able to eat it with appetite. But first let me lay a bandage upon your wound,' said he to Joseph; 'my balsam will revive you. Good,' said he, examining the wound; 'this is but a scratch which will do you no harm. You may thank God that you have got off so easily. And you, my young man,' said he to Martin, 'have you escaped altogether?'

'Altogether,' said he, having already picked up a few words of French by his intercourse with the Zouaves; 'only a spent bullet or two struck me here and there. I have had very good luck.'

The brave fellow had indeed received four bullets in his clothes, of which he was quite unconscious; his anxiety for his two friends had left him no thought for himself.

The meal was soon ready, and the two Zouaves did justice to it.

As they were spent with fatigue, the Hermit enjoined them to take some rest, and compelled them, notwithstanding all their resistance, to occupy his bed.

'Do not trouble yourselves about me, I know how to spend the night, and to-morrow I shall find a better shelter for you my friends; but your wounded comrade must remain with me till he recovers.'

He went into Victor's room while the two Zouaves lay down to rest, and sat down watching by his side.

'Poor boy!' murmured he softly; 'still so young, and so blooming with life and strength. An only son, perhaps, whose parents are now lying sleepless in sorrowful anguish and torturing uncertainty as to the fate of their beloved child. This is but one of the thousand miseries entailed by this cruel war against God and His Church. How many tears shall this unhappy day cause to flow? All this for the phantom of imaginary Italian unity. Oh, Italy! my unhappy country! how long will you be allured by the 'chimera' which your enemies set before you, to drag you into the gulf of perdition at last? There was a time when I was blind also; I was young and enthusiastic, and my heart, like the heart of my friends, Silvio Pellico, Maroncelli, and many more beside, burnt with love for my country; but we understood not in what her true happiness consists. Our dreams might be beautiful, but they were only dreams. Time and experience, thank God, have opened my eyes. Oh, truly did you speak, my dear Pellico, when you said to me in one of our confidential conversations—'My good friend, I still burn with the same love for my country, but it is no longer so short-sighted a love, and I sigh to see how Italy is running herself by seeking to accomplish an impossible work. If I could make my voice heard by all those unhappy men who are led astray by false patriotism, I would say to them: Stifle the evil passions which have been set on fire amongst you. I love my country as dearly as ever, but I see that its glory is not to be founded upon anger and strife. The true duty of its sons is to love one another, and to unite to draw the sword against the usurpers. So said my Silvio,' continued the old man; 'but alas! his words reached but few; moreover, men's ears were deafened by the voice of passion. Happy friend? you are now at rest in the bosom of God, who has taken you away that you might not see the evils that have fallen upon your unhappy country.'

The venerable old man thus murmured on in his reverie; but at last seeing that Victor was sleeping quietly, he rose, slipped gently out of the hut, and ascended the hill against which it was built.

It was a glorious night. A fresh breeze spread its fragrance all around; a thousand stars glittered in the firmament; and the dome of the Loretto in the distance, cast its black shadow upon the dark blue sky.

It was a picturesque sight to see the venerable old man as he stood there like a messenger of Heaven, stretching out his arms like a prophet, while the wind played amid his snowy beard.

'Italy!' said he, 'unhappy land! return from